

Bedbourn Church.

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The churches which surround the city, which this Society regards as its home, cannot, except in rare instances, vie with some in neighbourhoods well known to architectural students in the grandeur of their external effect, and the reason of this is easily seen in the nature of the materials at the disposal of their architects.

The important and magnificent Abbey, the church of which is now our Diocesan Cathedral, was indeed a vast school of art and of architecture, and its pupils were among the foremost artists and architects of their day ; but when men so instructed had to work in Hertfordshire and its surrounding districts, they found no better materials to their hand than, close to the Abbey, the bricks of a remarkable Roman city, and further away the flints which abounded both in chalk and gravel, and a stone so-called, but really only a cretaceous clunch, mined at considerable depth in the Totternhoe Hills. With a material of the last kind it is evident that had structures like the towers and spires of Lincolnshire or Northamptonshire been attempted, they must soon have crumbled under the influence of the weather, and though rich external tracery is sometimes found in windows, and elaborate mouldings also both in windows and doors, the wiser masons of this neighbourhood, who knew the treacherous nature of the stone they had to deal with, strove, as far as possible, to keep external work clear of the rain drip, and were content with making their outside decorations as shallow and so as durable as they could. But when these men had to design the interior of their edifices, the stone which they could not trust without was of unusual value within, for it was easy to work, was capable of receiving the highest possible finish, and when protected from the weather was satisfactorily enduring.

We must look then in Hertfordshire, more to the interior than to the exterior of our churches for the

more perfect memorials of the talent of their first architects.

I am led to make this preface because in the church we are visiting now, remarkable as it is in its historical interest, we shall find most of its exterior work in a state of considerable dilapidation, with one, however, remarkable exception. I refer to the south aisle of the nave, and the very interesting chapel into which it leads. This is work of the "Perpendicular" Period, and somewhat late in the style, it is exceedingly curious, owing to the employment of ornamental brick of elaborate workmanship in its parapets, and I shall hope shortly to refer it to an ecclesiastical architect of much renown, albeit that he worked in a style which has been subjected in recent years to much hostile criticism.

And here let me venture a word in defence of that "Perpendicular" Period which has given us some of the noblest examples of mediæval mechanical and artistic work, extending in its earliest development from *circa* 1360 to its latest forms in the Tudor Period. That style has given us the choir of York Minster, with its superb eastern window, the nave of Canterbury, the tower and cloisters of Gloucester, the spire of S. Michael's, Coventry, with the noble church beneath it, Boston with its grand church and lantern tower famed alike for height and beauty, the greater part also of the far-famed towers of Somersetshire, with other towers and spires, which will at once be remembered, among which St. Neots and Fotheringhay among towers; Kettering, Oundle, Louth, and King's Sutton among the spires—stand conspicuous—in fact it may be said without fear of contradiction that the art of steeple building was not perfected till this period, and that no previous architects had learnt so well how to set a spire upon a tower, or to arrange parapets and pinnacles as these; and time would fail me to speak of roofs in wood and stone, of altar screens such as we now see nearly perfected again, through great munificence, in our cathedral; and internal carving and stall work, all which is due to the sometimes much-abused "Perpendicular" period. But I must be no partisan in this matter, and as there are two sides to every question, I must add that much of the unpopularity of "Perpendicular" in late years has been due to the fact that the style prevailed

when it became necessary to adapt older buildings to some later uses, and that the general introduction of glass, much of which was of a highly-enriched character, led to the insertion and alteration of windows, while many other serious changes were made in outlines by the lowering of roofs, recasing of walls, and other startling innovations. Why could not the "Perpendicular" reformers have spared us the nave of Winchester in its grand Norman simplicity? Why could they not have left the high-pitched roofs of St. Albans alone? Why need they have gone all round Peterborough and Ely inserting poor-looking tracery where none was required? say, and in these cases justly say, their critics. Forgive me for this digression, the reason for which will presently appear.

Let me now go back from the latest to the earliest of our English architectural periods.

We see in the tower of Redbourn Church, and in the northern arcade of its nave, unmistakable relics of a structure known to have been built here during the time of "Richard de Aubeny" (I quote from Mr. Buckler), or as it would appear he should be more properly named Richard de Albini, Abbot of St. Albans. We know how closely this church was associated with St. Albans Abbey; its Abbots, through their Chamberlains, were its mediæval rectors, the presbyters of the place being their vicars, while its great tithes appear to have been devoted to the clothing of their monks. There was, too, as we have already heard to-day, a priory here, important in its character though small in its extent, in which the Abbots of St. Albans had a large interest. This Richard was the second of the Norman Abbots of St. Albans, and the immediate successor of Paul of Caen, the builder of the great Norman Abbey church there. It would seem that Paul had worked so hard at St. Albans that his successor's hands were free to build at Redbourn and elsewhere, for we find from Matthew Paris that this church was dedicated, and so must have been completed in his time. We do not, however, learn from this author in the name of what saint this church was consecrated. It has been usually called the Church of St. Mary, but I learned with much interest from the present vicar the other day that some of the older inhabitants consider that its patron saint is no other than St. Amphibalus. The

consecrating bishop was, according to Matthew Paris * Herbert Losinga, first Bishop of Norwich, a prelate on whose private character I will not here enlarge, for he and his connexions appear to have been among the most rapacious of the Norman ecclesiastics, who thought to enrich themselves with British ecclesiastical spoils, though he appears to have been in better respects a man of considerable energy.

The Abbots of St. Albans though mitred were not in episcopal orders, and therefore needed the help of episcopal friends to consecrate their churches. Whether Herbert Losinga received more than his travelling expenses from Norwich, where he was busy building his Cathedral, and which his character as we may read it in Norwich histories will hardly lead us to suppose that he would be satisfied with, we cannot tell, but it seems that Abbot Richard did not send for the Bishop till he wanted him, and when he had got him he got all he could out of him, for he was the consecrating prelate not only here but at Sandridge, and it would seem also at Radwell, working besides for the foundation of a priory at Langley.

I will not trouble you with the Latin quotations and various references here to-day, though should this paper appear in our Society's Transactions they will of course be printed, as they are of great value and authority, but I may say before leaving this interesting topic, that as Richard de Albini was Abbot from 1097 to 1119, and that as he and Bishop Herbert Losinga both died in the latter year, we have a period of 22 years during which this church was certainly completed, and allowing some time for the building, and some interval before the decease of its active consecrating prelate, we may put the Norman details here at, say, about the year 1110.

The present tower has stood then for about 780 years; the hints which I gave at the outset will show that we must not expect much of the external detail to remain perfect in its Totternhoe clunch, but it is something to

* "Herbertus, Episcopus Norwicensis, dedicavit ecclesiam de Redburna, teste Ricardo presbytero * * Idem quoque dedicavit Capellam de Sandruge; testibus Ricardo, Radulpho et Alexandro * * Itemque Ordines fecit generales Herbertus Episcopus Norwicensis apud Langleiam; quando scilicet Ricardus Abbas proposuerat ibidem Cellam Monachorum constituere."—Matt. Paris, Vitæ Abbat., Wat's ed., append. pp. 78-79.

see an external string course exhibiting to this day signs of the forests which surrounded the village, and showing that it was an early work in stone, which still exhibits the earlier tokens of wood building in the saw-tooth combined with the billet moulding. Here within we see the billet alone, but the saw is also evident externally in combination. I commend this interesting feature to your careful examination.

The Norman Church thus completed and consecrated appears to have stood without alteration till the Decorated Period. At that time the very common removal of the usual Norman apsidal east end, and the elongation of of the chancel must have taken place. No record appears to exist bearing on the history of the very great changes then effected, but the Decorated chancel arch has features much in common with a Decorated arch between the eastern chapels of Ayot St. Lawrence, and the very interesting sedilia and side windows here point to the same enriched period of the style.

I am not able to say whether the double cusped reticulated tracery of the east window is an exact reproduction of what was there before, but it seems to be so. We have double cusping of great beauty at Wheathampstead; it is also present at Ayot and at St. Paul's Walden, all churches more or less under the architectural influence of St. Albans. At the tower here too changes were made, inserted belfry windows, a western door, and the arch leading to the nave all belong to about this period, as well as a strong buttress, which necessity compelled to be added at the south-west angle, for the tower stood too near the "Reeds" of Redbourn to have other than a somewhat damp and insecure foundation.

It has been said—but I have not been able to trace the authority, though I believe local tradition points in the same direction—that this church was grievously injured during the wars of the Roses, being turned into a stable, and otherwise desecrated, at the time of the St. Albans battles, and that Abbot John of Wheathampstead found it necessary to accomplish here some large works of restoration. This point has seemed so interesting that I have endeavored, with Mr. Fowler's valuable assistance, and great powers of research, to obtain documentary authority for the suggestion. Mr.

Cussans has been before us with some portion of our acquired information, though I cannot follow him, entirely in his interpretations. The record is mixed, and contains references to work done apparently both at the priory and at this Church. * No doubt a monk, writing in the St. Albans Cloisters, of work which was common talk in the Abbey, about a place near and intimately known, would write with a certain looseness which is perplexing to a modern enquirer, but I think we may fairly say that the rebuilding of a kitchen recorded of this Abbot here, and the reparation of a stone boundary wall, must both have taken place at the Priory, while the decoration of the chapel, the changes in position of altars, the nave roof and clerestory, and the reference to a general ornamentation of the fabric, certainly seems to belong to the architectural history of this church.

How my friend Mr. Cussans has been able to get the "building of a room over the nave probably for the anchorite or church guardian," out of "*Cameræ erectæ supra navem ecclesie*," I have searched the dictionary, and this building, in vain to find; there is no trace or probability of any such erection, while the clerestory, with its roof and windows, which we see above us, exactly answers to the description given.

Abbot John of Wheathampstead is also described as having moved the high altar, and having built a stone wall separating the chapel from the nave of the church; the word is "capella" which Mr. Cussans translates "chancel," and this leads him to suggest a stone screen at the back of the present wooden one, between the nave and the chancel, but "cancellus" would have been the

* Works here by Abbot John of Wheathampstead.

Amundesham, Vol. II., p. 200.—"Item apud Redburnam in variis reparationibus factis ibidem, ut puta, in clausura exterioris curiæ; in perornatione Capellæ; in emendatione altarium; et in adjutorio impenso ad facturam Cameræ erectæ supra navem ecclesie; et ad renovationem Coquinæ, una cum ornamentis variis huic loco collocatis, expendisse creditur ultra summam quadraginta librarum."

Ib. Appendix A, p. 264.—"Item in reparatione facta in muris lapideis circa Curiam exteriorem ibidem £7 18s. 4d. Item, in remotione majoris altaris, et in factura cujusdam muri lapidei, qui separat Capellam a nave ecclesie ibidem; necnon in pictura dictæ Capellæ, una cum factura cujusdam Cameræ supra navem ecclesie erectæ * * Item, in contributione ad fabricam Coquinæ ibidem. £7 1s. 8d."

word, as used in the records, had the chancel been intended here. I think that though the record is provokingly vague and perplexing, a careful survey of the south aisle will show that the works here of Abbot John of Wheathampstead, in addition to the nave clerestory, consisted in the repair of that aisle with the elongation for its eastern chapel. A piscina in the south wall shows that the original altar of that aisle was in a line with the chancel arch, and that the work to the eastward is all a "Perpendicular" addition. The stone wall between chapel and nave should then be read as the "Perpendicular" arch and walling which opened from the chapel into the chancel, the construction of which might necessitate the change in the arrangement of the high altar alluded to.

Nowhere is the beautiful rood screen here seen referred to in the record. It seems too early for Abbot John's work by some 50 years, being early in the Perpendicular period, but he probably did not neglect it in the various works of decoration which he is recorded as having carried out here, and possibly its eastern side received his attention. I would venture then to say that to this famous ecclesiastical architect we may safely ascribe the restoration of the south aisle, a restoration which was accompanied with the insertion of windows and the addition of the remarkable parapet I have before alluded to, with the building in correspondence of its important eastern chapel. For what purpose was this chapel? Here is an interesting inquiry, which can only be met by others. Was this church originally dedicated to S. Mary? if so, the chancel proper would be, as in similar cases, the lady chapel, if to S. Amphibalus this new chapel might be a lady chapel; but I think Abbot John would hardly have built here a rich chapel of this kind, had no previous altar existed in his honour, without making a special effort that where a saint, second only in interest in the mind of a monk of St. Albans to the English proto-martyr, had been faithful unto death, a chapel and altar worthy of his memory should adorn a parish church in such close alliance with his Abbey.